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Skydiving instructor, linked to jump that killed Los Banos teen, arrested on federal charges

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The San Joaquin Sheriff's Office responded to an accident near the Lodi Parachute Center that killed two skydivers on August 6, 2016. A federal grand jury has indicted Robert Pooley, accusing him of using a forged signature to give unauthorized tandem instruction courses to seven victims including one killed in the 2016 jump. SAMMY CAIOLA

A Northern California skydiver has been arrested on federal charges, accused of using a forged signature to give unauthorized tandem instruction courses to more than a half-dozen victims — including [one who died along with an 18-year-old first-time skydiver during a 2016 jump near Lodi](#).

Robert Pooley, 46, of Acampo faces four charges of wire fraud and two of aggravated identity theft, the U.S. Department of Justice announced in a news release Tuesday. His June 10 grand jury indictment was unsealed following his Monday arrest.

The [indictment comes nearly five years after the U.S. Parachute Association revealed in the wake of the August 2016 jump](#) that killed instructor Yong Kwon, 25, of South Korea, and Kwon's student, 18-year-old first-time jumper Tyler Turner of Los Banos, that Kwon had not been properly certified as a tandem instructor.

USPA leadership said at the time that Kwon had been taught by Pooley, who had his USPA teaching certificate suspended the prior year.

Court documents unsealed Monday mirror those allegations, saying Pooley in 2010 obtained ratings as a “tandem examiner” with the USPA, as well as a similar certification from Uninsured United Parachute Technologies LLC, a company that manufactures tandem parachutes. He used these ratings to give training courses to skydivers looking to obtain their own tandem instructor certifications.

The indictment says both organizations suspended Pooley's tandem ratings in August 2015, but that he continued to run instructional courses, concealing the suspension from his students by forging the signature of an approved instructor, according to the DOJ news release.

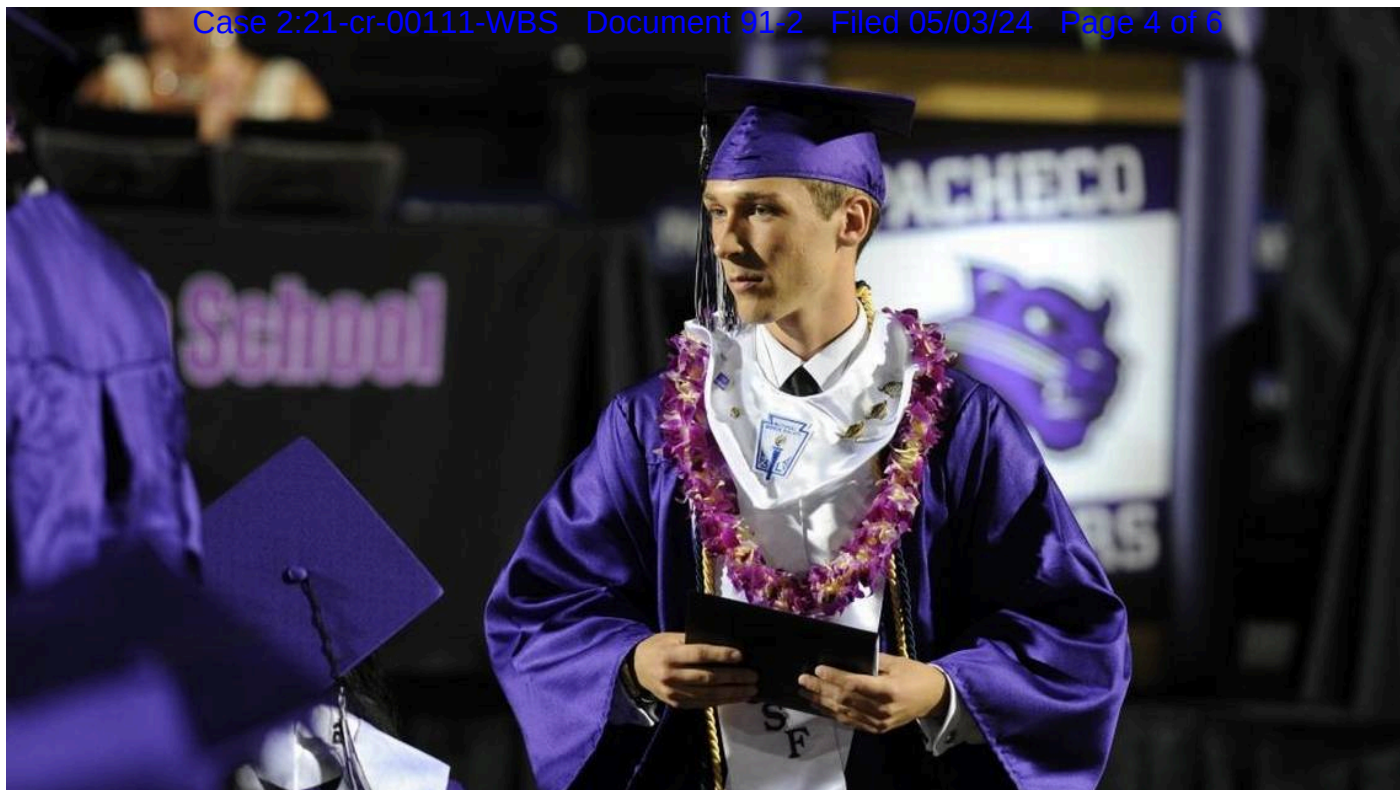
“Pooley used a digital image of the signature of another properly rated USPA and UPT tandem examiner to sign off on training that Pooley himself had conducted when the other tandem examiner was not even in the country,” the news release says.

The indictment does not name the individual whose signature was allegedly forged, but USPA officials in 2016 said Pooley’s falsified paperwork contained the forged signature of experienced skydiver Yuri Garmashov.

Garmashov last year filed a lawsuit against the USPA in federal court, alleging he was unfairly blamed for the 2016 deaths.

The USPA following the 2016 tragedy revealed that it had suspended Pooley’s teaching certificate in 2015 because, among other issues, he was not properly completing paperwork about his students.

This month’s indictment claims Pooley ran his courses for prospective tandem instructors at least in part using jumps at Skydive Lodi Parachute Center, referred to in court documents as “Organization 1,” which is owned by Bill Dause (“Person 1”). The double-fatal jump on Aug. 6, 2016, took off from Skydive Lodi.



Tyler Turner, 18, of Los Banos, was killed Saturday while skydiving in Lodi, according to his mother Francine Salazar. Turner pictured here in June at commencement ceremonies for Pacheco High School in Los Banos, where he graduated with honors. He planned to attend UC Merced in the fall. Gene Lieb *Los Banos Enterprise*

The indictment says at least seven victims who sought or received tandem instruction courses were defrauded by Pooley — Kwon and six others. The victims hailed from Australia, South Korea, Chile, New Zealand, Mexico and California, according to court documents.

Prosecutors said the victims were charged approximately \$1,000 to \$1,600 for training courses. A portion of this total would go to Pooley in cash, while another portion would go to Dause “to provide the aircraft, flights, and tandem equipment for the training jumps,” the indictment says.

The indictment further says Dause “or someone working with him or at his direction or control would often refer potential tandem instructor students to Pooley.”

Dause has not been criminally indicted, but a judge earlier this year ordered him personally responsible for a \$40 million judgment to be paid to Turner's family, who sued Dause for negligence following the 18-year-old's death.

Pooley's indictment says that in June 2016, Victim 1 emailed Lodi Parachute Center from Mexico, "inquiring about 'getting my tandem ratings with you guys.'" An unidentified associate of Dause forwarded the email to Pooley, saying "I think this is more your expertise!!!!" court documents say. Pooley emailed Victim 1 the following day with information about the tandem course, saying it'd cost \$1,100.

Pooley "falsely led candidates to believe they could legitimately obtain their USPA D licenses, USPA Tandem Instructor ratings, and/or their certification to use UPT tandem parachute systems from these courses," the indictment continues.

Court documents further state that multiple victims asked Pooley for refunds following the fatal August 2016 incident, but that he did not give them their money back.

A hub of controversy, Skydive Lodi Parachute Center has a long history of fatal jumps. A [Sacramento Bee review of records following the death of 57-year-old jumper Sabrina Call earlier this year found that there have been at least 25 jumper deaths](#) linked to the site since 1985.

The deadly 2016 incident led to the passage of AB 295, known as Tyler's Law, the following year. That legislation says that owners of skydiving operations have a duty to ensure parachutists in command of tandem jumps, as well as parachute riggers packing the chutes, are in compliance with federal laws relating to parachute safety and certifications.

Last year, asked about Garmashov's lawsuit, Dause said he knew little about the allegations against Pooley.

"There's been a lot of stuff going back and forth," Dause said at the time.

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